

THE UPPER XINGÚ AREA

13

level of general anxiety. It was usually the result of several days of rumor, omens, and strange fires in the north. 152
181
202
648

Late one night during Quain's stay, after most of the village had retired, a near panic occurred when two women shouted that the Suyá were attacking. All the initiated men, even the weak and old, rushed to the village center with their bows and arrows. The women and children from two of the four Trumai houses hurried with their hammocks to the other two houses. The frightened men milled around in the center of the village with no apparent organization or direction. The chief, who was trembling, did not take command of the situation. [622]

If this had been a real attack, noted Quain, the raiders would have given a loud yell and loosed a volley of arrows. He later made an investigation and found no signs of intruders. One of the women thought that someone had thrown dirt at her. Quain believed this to be a habit of the Suyá, but one that was usually a friendly overture.

The women feared other tribes more than did the men, for one of the main purposes of raids was to capture women. In every upper Xingú community women from other tribes are always found. The dispersal of women takes three forms: capture in warfare (by groups outside the area), open abduction of a woman by intimidation of her fellow-villagers, and peaceful intertribal marriage. According to de Lima, the Suyá raid the Waurá village on the Batovi River for female captives, as the women of the Arawakan tribes are the only potters of the region.¹⁰ The Trumai lost many young women to the Kamayurá by intimidation, the second of the above means. Most of the women in the Trumai village were at one time held by the Kamayurá with the result that, in many Trumai marriages, the woman is several years older than the man. At the time of Quain's visit, Trumai women were still living among the Kamayurá and other groups. One of them, the sister of the Trumai chief, ran away from the Kamayurá and returned home because her husband had beaten her, an action that angered the Trumai greatly. There she picked up the threads of her old life, but after a few weeks a party of Kamayurá took her back to their village. The Trumai offered no resistance, either physical or verbal, although they outnumbered the visitors, for to have done so would have invited retaliation. 648
562
[552]
[521]
[583]

The fact that the Trumai had lost many women completely, or regained them only after their most fertile years had passed, was probably a contributing factor to the depopulation of the group. The losses were only partially compensated for by the marriage of outside women into the Trumai village. There were three foreign women in the community in 1938: a Suyá, a Mohinaku, and a Kamayurá. Their status was lower than that of the Trumai women, and they were at times taunted because of their foreign origin. They did not participate as fully in the [582]
642
563
[161]
[583]
[86]
[554]

¹⁰ De Lima 1960, p. 5.

THE TRUMAI INDIANS OF CENTRAL BRAZIL

648 14 culture as the other women, but their everyday existence was much the
563 same.

[186] Men were also taken as captives, although not to the same extent
[554] as were women. Tun and Aloari, two Trumai men, had lived in capti-
648 vity among the Yuruna. They had feared their captors at first, but once
727 they had learned the language, they said, they were no longer afraid.
Apparently both men had been well treated by the Yuruna, for they were
kindly disposed towards that tribe. The elder of the two men had a Yuruna
wife, whom he left when he returned to his people. How this was ac-
complished is not known, but escape could not have been very difficult.

563 Another factor promoting the incorporation of both women and men
[67] into other tribes was the depopulation and extinction of their own
groups. When the southern Trumai village was disbanded many of the
survivors joined the northern Trumai, but some moved in with other
tribes. Similarly, de Lima reported that the Yaulapiti, who disbanded
sometime between 1938 and 1945, were to be found among the Kama-
yurá, Trumai, and Aueti.¹⁷

It is possible that more Yaulapiti settled with Arawakan speaking
groups, but the three above-named tribes were their closest neighbors.
The remnants of a disbanded group might also join villages in which
they had close kin or personal relationships. A later report by the Bra.
Villas Boas, who maintained the recently established airstrip of the
Fundação Brasil Central, stated that, as in the case of the Trumai, the
Yaulapiti have reconstituted themselves as a group by the establish-
ment of a one-house village.¹⁸ Clearly, except for the peace that has
reigned since the airfield was built, a village of some twenty-five people
would not be secure from attack. But while the chances of survival are still
far from good, the initiation of such a project shows the eagerness of the
participants to preserve their social identity.

[81] The main purposes of warfare in the region are to capture women, take
721 loot, and exact revenge. Captive-taking has a clear economic basis in
583 the sporadic warfare between the Suyá and Waurá, as the Suyá cap-
ture Waurá women for their knowledge of pottery-making. Among the
tribes of the *ulurá* area proper, however, this is not done. Arawakan
women are married, but Quain's notes indicate that they do not practice
pottery-making in their new villages.

727 It is possible that male and female captives are taken by upper Kingó
groups from tribes outside the region to bolster their waning numerical
strength, but infanticide and abortion are also present in the area.
[847] However, captives do not have to be reared from infancy, and do not
constitute the same strain on the economy that children do. It is also

¹⁷ De Lima 1949, p. 26.

¹⁸ This information was obtained verbally from Dr. Eduardo Galvão. Cf. Oberg 1953, p. 4.

THE UPPER XINGÚ AREA

17

Visits might be made to obtain a bride, engage in trade, participate in some intertribal ceremony, or for a combination of any of these reasons. Most visits were ostensibly of a purely social nature, but they were also used to frighten and impress. Stealing was frequent, especially when the host tribe, like the Trumai, was weak. The Trumai rarely protested against thefts while the visitors were still in the village, although they vehemently expressed their indignation later. Such discretion was due more to fear than etiquette. [648] [574] [584] [685] [552]

The inferior position of the Trumai was most evident when visitors were in the village. The Kamayurá, especially, treated the Trumai with arrogance and contempt. At times they would enter the Trumai village without having built the customary warning fire. The Trumai, on the other hand, did everything possible to please their visitors and prove their generosity and good will toward them. Quain was berated by the Trumai chief for being too niggardly toward the Kamayurá, and he found that greater respect was accorded to the Kamayurá chief than to either himself or the Trumai chief. The Kamayurá felt alighted that Quain had not visited them instead of the contemptible Trumai, and, when Quain went to meet the visiting Kamayurá chief, the latter turned away with an air of bored indifference. [202] [123] [554]

The Kamayurá chief was immediately given a stool to sit on and was plied with cigarettes. When he threw one away after a few puffs, he was promptly given another. Deference was also paid to ordinary Kamayurá, although to a lesser degree. Once when such a member came to the Trumai village alone, the man who received him rushed to Quain's house to borrow a chair in order to reach some tobacco which had been placed on a high shelf. He was in a great hurry, for it would not be good to keep his guest waiting. [352]

This behavior stands in sharp contrast to a visit to the Kamayurá village made by Quain and a party of Trumai. The chief delegated their reception to his brother. No special attention was paid to them, although the villagers were active and industrious in an apparent effort to impress. The Trumai were not even asked to sit on the log in the village center.

Due to the extensive intertribal relations, command of a language besides one's own is common in the area generally. But since Trumai is an independent tongue and the number of Trumai small, it is probable that multilingual people were more frequent among them than in other tribes. Their "second" language was usually Kamayurá, but few outsiders spoke Trumai, although more understood it. When Kamayurá came to visit, conversation was ordinarily in their tongue. Of the three foreign women in the Trumai village, only the Suyá woman could speak even a broken Trumai. Since the Suyá had no peaceful relations with the tribes of the headwaters, the Gé language was not widely known there. The other two foreign women merely understood Trumai. [648] [191] [563]

TRUMAI SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

55

pursue their individual affairs. Maibu made speeches in the evening men's circle or in the early morning, telling the men to plant their gardens or urging all to gather *pique* fruit. Such proddings had little meaning, as they were usually made during the appropriate season for these activities, and most people would have planted or gathered as a matter of course.

Those who did not choose to do what Maibu suggested went their own way, whether it was to fish or sleep. Maibu was a gadfly; yet he was the conscience of the Trumai. Perhaps more people would have procrastinated if it had not been for his admonitions. He was truly interested in the good of the village. He asked Quain for presents only for others, never for himself.

Cooperative work on the community level was usually organized by Maibu. The decision to perform such work was generally made by common agreement, but it was the chief's function to recruit the necessary labor and see that the task was done. This he did with varying degrees of success, for his power was limited.

The chief was accorded much more respect by his housemates and close kinsmen than by the rest of the villagers. The people resisted him in varying degrees, depending on their relationship to him and their individual personalities. His control over the women was particularly weak. When Quain first arrived, they refused to carry water for him, despite Maibu's orders. When they realized that they were to be given gifts for their trouble they grudgingly consented to do so, but, in the meantime, the chief had fetched the water, since the performance of such tasks for an outsider was the responsibility of the village as a whole, and no other man would do women's work.

Referring to the limitations on chiefly powers, Quain noted, "Maibu has to put up with a lot of boing and do a lot of talking. Obedience comes to him only after a long time. He seems to have no 'big stick.'" The Trumai chief had no coercive power whatsoever. This particular headman was not a powerful shaman, although such a combination was possible and would undoubtedly have enhanced his position. The only act of a supernatural nature that he could perform was curing by sucking and blowing smoke, which was practiced by almost every adult Trumai male.

Maibu was often completely ignored, and some of the men made a point of flouting his authority. The men of Aloari's house were extremely antagonistic toward him and told Quain that he was not a true "*aek*." These men rarely took part in the few group work projects and usually they were also absent from the wrestling matches. Their own prestige motives and individual inclinations brought them into frequent conflict with Maibu, both in his capacity as the man of highest status and as the village goad. Their resentment of authority never resulted in

622 outright rebellion. Despite a great deal of grumbling and non-compli-
554- ance, they still tacitly recognized Maibu as chief.

622 One of Maibu's main prerogatives was his talking function. He alone
554 had the role of exhorter of the people. Other men would be "ashamed,"
537 he said, to speak so. Most of Maibu's speeches were delivered at night
in the men's circle or before work started in the morning. The attitude
of his audience ranged from interest to bored indifference and outright
ridicule. One morning Maibu lay in his hammock and shouted for
everyone to go out to gather fruit. The initial response to this was a
shout from some of the houses, telling him to be quiet. Later some
people drifted out of the village carrying baskets, and still later others
followed, grumbling that they were being driven from the village. This
was a common complaint. Because of the tone in which it was said,
Quain thought at first that they were actually being exiled.

622 The chief had no symbols of office outside of the above prerogatives;
554 yet a deference of sorts was shown him. When Maibu entered the men's
circle or Quain's house, someone always got up to give him a seat.
[296] Tobacco was usually supplied him, and the donor would roll the cigarette
and light it before making the presentation. Even the men who told
Quain that Maibu was not a "real chief" made these gifts. Maibu him-
self did not hesitate to send someone across the village through the rain
to fetch something. These favors were usually performed by his kinsmen
and co-residents, although occasionally more distant persons obliged.
[431] On the other hand, Maibu was expected to be generous towards all the
[422] other Trumai. Nearly everything that Quain gave him passed to other
hands. Maibu did not even have a bow of his own.

622 Maibu's poverty was attributable in part to his heavy gift obligations
and in part to the fact that he had no garden. He said to Quain that
he did not plant because he was a chief. However, he was not completely
a non-producer. He went fishing, joined in collective labor, and helped
his wife in gathering. At none of these tasks did he occupy himself
strenuously. The only articles that he manufactured were arrows and
spears. He thus made no trade commodities, relying on others, princi-
pally his co-residents, for all his artifacts and food. On most days he did
little except talk, sleep, and philander with the unmarried women.

Inheritance of the chieftaincy was nominally patrilineal. Maibu,
however, was the son of the daughter of the Trumai chief whom von den
Steinen had met, indicating that the office can pass matrilineally if there
are no male heirs available. (Maibu's brother's son, Jawaku, adopted
by Maibu through the levirate, was to have been the next Trumai
chief.) But the Trumai chief reported by Galvão nine years later was Alo-
ari, who was only a distant relative of Maibu.⁶ What happened in the
years between 1938 and 1947 is not known, but it is apparent that

⁶ This information was received verbally from Dr. Eduardo Galvão.

575 the group, and they never participated in any of its activities. Occasionally men gathered in the village center during the day, but at night the circle always formed, generally lasting from sundown until about nine o'clock. In the afternoon it was often the scene of wrestling matches. Talk usually went on then also, but the gatherings were smaller than at night.

[521] At night most of the men were present, and conversation ranged over a variety of topics. Of greatest interest were neighboring tribes, past warfare and present threats to peace. Gossip, usually about sex, found ready ears. This was the time when the chief made most of his speeches, and the time when plans for a fishing trip, for salt manufacture, or for a journey to the Waurá for pots were discussed. The men's circle was also the place where the shaman practiced his art, and, as noted above, where grievances were aired.

[626] The social life of the males was centered almost completely in these gatherings, and it was in them that the mechanisms of village authority and social control were expressed. Also, the men's circle underlined the cleavage between the activities of the men and of the women. The women had no formal grouping such as the men's circle, but they showed solidarity when the need arose. While men were dominant, as Quain [562] said, they "look on the women as an ungoverned force," and open [578] group quarrels were not infrequent between the sexes.

Status

554 *Aek*, the Trumai word for chief, also denoted membership in the
565 upper half of what is nominally a status class. Members of the lower
198 half of this class were loosely referred to as *camara*, a term which,
622 according to Galvão, probably diffused into the region from rural
624 Brazil, where workers are called *camaradas*.¹⁰ There was some uncertainty on the part of Quain's informants as to who were members of the *aek* division. In general, it included the chief, the two sub-chiefs, and their families. But while the status appears to have been hereditary, its transmission was loose and uncertain. For instance, Maibu was an *aek*, but he refused to classify his brothers as such. However, the fathers of both Maibu and Katauka, one of the sub-chiefs, were *aek*. Matiwana's three daughters and his son derived their status from him, further supporting the case for patrilineality. On the other hand, the children of one of the daughters were *aek*, even though their father was a *camara*. The significance of being *aek* had probably declined with the weakening of leadership patterns and the lessened importance of the sub-chiefs. Today, the *aek-camara* division is non-functional, membership is confused, and, except for the chieftainship, it is correlated only vaguely

¹⁰ Galvão 1949, p. 40.

TRUMAI SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

61 [624]
554
565
622
[778]

with prestige. Aloari, who later became chief, was classified as a *camara* at the time of Quain's visit.

At the top of the Trumai prestige scale was the chief. His authority was limited, but he was more respected than any other man. The two sub-chiefs enjoyed some, but not much, prestige. Matiwana was an old man, and old age decreases status among the Trumai. He took the lead in group curing ceremonies, however, and was the repository of much Trumai lore and learning. Nor was Katauka, the other sub-chief, very influential. And neither official had the privilege of "talking" to the people as Maibu did. That Katauka was a shaman and Matiwana the chief curer of the village contributed more to their prestige than did their position as sub-chiefs or their membership in the *ask* class. Tun, the shaman, and Oirupa, the sorcerer, ranked just below the chief in importance. The former enjoyed some standing as his prognostications of enemy movements were relied upon and respected by everybody. Oirupa had added power only because he was feared. [888]

[754]
[756]

The only other criteria of status were youth and aggressiveness. Property was not a point of prestige, but those whose assertive attitudes gave them some status and influence were also those who manifested an accumulative attitude toward property. Youth and sexual prowess were highly regarded. Boasting about sexual exploits was usually done privately, but great pride was taken in them. This was related to the general esteem in which youth, size and vigor were held. To be a successful wrestler, therefore, enhanced a man's position. The Trumai were also impressed by Quain's height and wanted to know what kind of medicines white men used to make them so tall. There was no warrior class and no special status for success in combat, except insofar as it was an indication of strength and courage.

565
181
554
[556]
[831]

As noted above, the status of old men was very low, except when they had special knowledge or office. Yet these attributes did not protect Matiwana from being contemptuously referred to as an old man. Moreover, Quain was severely criticized for giving presents to old Yahu, most of whose property had already been claimed by others, since the Trumai did not think it proper that one so old should have any possessions beyond fishing and hunting equipment and other necessities. A favorite insult among the Trumai was to tell someone he was old, and by implication that he no longer bathed or was able to fornicate. [123]

[123]

Prestige variations, on the whole, were not great in the Trumai village. The community had no clearly defined social groupings based on status, nor were there social mechanisms for human exploitation. Variations in wealth were slight, and their only significance was that one man might have more tools and trinkets than another. It is possible, however, that before the Trumai had declined to their present low estate, prestige and authority were more clearly patterned, as they still were in the Kamayurá village. [421]

888
[123]
[421]
[578]

554
565
[556]

888

[50] grades except in the broadest sense, as the term for "younger" covered everyone from infants to people in the prime of life. The terms, however, indicate a keen consciousness that those who have passed their prime are distinct from those who are still developing or are at the height of their physical powers.

[181]

The Trumai believed that it was good to be young, vigorous, and strong, while advancing years were a stigma. Quain always met with a stout denial whenever he suggested to someone that he was older than someone else. An old person, they said with contempt, was one who did not bathe or shave the crown of his head any more. Mayuva did not bother to bathe one morning and was derided by Kerami, who accused him of being old. A short time later he reappeared freshly bathed.

[626]

[162]

[563]

While several individuals were considered "older," the only ones who fell into the Trumai category of true old age were Matiwana and Yahu. The latter's status was further lowered by the fact that he was considered to be a Kamayurá; his father was a member of that tribe and he had a son living with them. However, Yahu was still sexually potent and a full participant in the economy.

[195]

A person of truly advanced old age was called *dewan*. This term, which has uncomplimentary connotations, was applied only to men "whose penis is dead" or to women past menopause. Matiwana was the only person of either sex who fitted the *dewan* category. The only tasks for which he was suited were light craft work, gathering firewood, and an occasional fishing trip. He was, however, the fount of nearly all Trumai ceremonial knowledge. Matiwana was well cared for by his son and by his household. The son's affection and loyalty to his father were deep, and he was the old man's constant companion. The rest of the villagers remained aloof from Matiwana.

888

554

[756]

The Trumai abhorred the thought of their own future old age, and they transferred some of this fear to the persons of the aged. Status declined with age, and Matiwana had his ceremonial lore and shamanistic skill to thank for what position he still maintained.

Death

768

764

Neither the village site nor the house of the deceased had to be abandoned following death. Burial took place in the village plaza. The corpse was interred lying on its back in an extended position, wrapped and bound in its hammock. Numerous cooking utensils, including a *ja'meo* (ceramic griddle for baking *beijá*) were buried with both male and female deceased.

765

No deaths occurred while Quain was in residence, but mourning was still going on for a man who had recently died. The burden of mourning fell on the female relatives of the deceased. The only observance in-